

American Medical Association

Physicians dedicated to the health of America



Statement

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AMA: PASS PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS ACT THIS CONGRESS

Statement attributable to: J. Edward Hill, MD
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"Everyday, the physicians of this nation see first-hand how much we need The Patients' Bill of Rights Act. We've said it for years, and we'll continue to say it until it's made right: health care decisions must be made by patients and physicians -- not by insurance companies whose bottom line benefits from limiting patient care.

"It's really that simple. The Patients' Bill of Rights assures that physicians can continue to be patient advocates. It assures that patients get the care they need when they need it.

"We hear it everyday: consumers are concerned that their health insurance plan will abandon them when they need security the most -- when they're ill, or when they're in an emergency situation, or both.

"Recently, a young woman from Maryland told her story of a terrible hiking accident in which she fell, hit her head, and rolled unconscious off a 40-foot rock cliff. She had serious injuries: a fractured skull, hearing loss, bleeding in her inner ear, and other injuries. She was airlifted for emergency care. During recovery, she was shocked to find that her insurer refused to pay the hospital because she didn't have pre-authorization. She said she felt 'utterly helpless and alone' against a big health plan. That's not right.

"When a person is ill or injured, their priority, and their physician's priority should be getting that patient quality care -- making the person better. When a patient worries more about whether care will be covered by their insurance than they do about getting well -- something is terribly wrong.

"The Patient Bill of Rights Act goes a long way toward making things right in a rapidly changing health care system. Its common sense provisions include timely and appropriate access to medical specialists, access to emergency services based on a prudent layperson standard, and the right to appeal to an independent review board when care is denied.

"While these seem like basic, common sense rights, we recognize that passing patient protection legislation this Congress will be a challenge. Those who fight this legislation will spend a lot of money to defeat it. But the AMA has been fighting for patient rights for years, and it's a battle we will continue to fight -- for patients -- and with patients. We must pass the Patients' Bill of Rights Act without delay. It's simply the right thing to do."

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